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'90-PLUS PER CENT TRACKS IN INDIA SUBSTANDARD': AFI SPOKESPERSON

Athletics Federation of India spokesperson and World Athletics VP Adille Sumariwalla said running tracks in India are substandard. A look...

'WORLD ATHLETICS NOT HAPPY WITH QUALITY'

According to Sumariwalla, the AFI met World Athletics in Tokyo last year where World Athletics Championships took place. WA said that tracks in India did not meet set standards. "WA has called us and said 'you need to get involved.' They showed us some data, which was quite shocking," Sumariwalla said in a press conference on Saturday | P17

'GENUINE VENDORS' TO BE LISTED SOON

- Former Indian sprinter claimed that at places, tire rubber is used instead of polyurethane and it is painted on top. He went on to add that they will get 'destroyed' thanks to wear and tear
- Vendors responsible for bringing material are 'fly-by-night.' AFI to prepare list of genuine names who can provide good material

8

NUMBER OF 'CLASS-1' WORLD ATHLETICS - CERTIFIED TRACKS IN INDIA

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

PM seeks forgiveness from all women of the country as bill to expedite quota fell in LS

Oppn will pay for its women's bill 'sin': Modi

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday berated the Congress-led Opposition for what he called was their 'big sin' of rejecting the Constitutional amendments to operationalise the 33% women's quota in the Lok Sabha the previous day. He said the women of the country would not forget how the Congress and its allies like the DMK, Trinamool Congress and Samajwadi Party opposed the legislation aimed at advancing women's representation in legislative bodies.

His address to the nation came ahead of assembly elections in two Opposition-held states, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where the ruling TMC and DMK were among those that voted against the amendments.

Launching a broadside against the Congress, Modi accused the party of being anti-women and opposed to reforms in the nation-building process. "The Congress inherited the British legacy of divide and rule and spread the canard of North-South divide. They opposed Article 370, triple talaq, PM Jan Dhan Yojna, Aadhaar, digital payments, GST, reservation for the economically weaker section in the general classes and many other efforts made in the larger interest of the nation," he alleged.

The PM also criticised the Congress' stance on delimitation, alleging it was fuelling divisions. He said the government had consistently clarified that no state's proportional representation in Parliament would be affected, yet the Opposition refused to relent.

Describing the Congress, TMC, DMK and SP as dynastic parties, he alleged they resisted the bill out of fear of losing control within their organisations and preventing women outside their families from rising to leadership. "Nari Shakti Vandan Amendment was the need of hour and we made an honest effort to ensure balanced empowerment across the North, South, East and West. But the Congress, which is a parasite on regional parties, spiked them," the PM charged. He accused the Opposition of committing the political crime of opposing amendments aimed at expediting the implementation of the reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

He said, "A woman forgets everything, but not her insult; this insult by Congress and its allies will always remain in every woman's heart." P11

The opposition has committed a sin by opposing women's reservation, and they will surely be punished for this. Opposition parties have insulted our Constitution by defeating the bill

Narendra Modi, prime minister

PIC: SHEKHAR YADAV

What happened yesterday was a very significant victory for democracy. The government's conspiracy to alter the federal structure and weaken democracy was defeated and stopped

Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra, Cong gen secy

INDIA bloc for quick rollout of the 2023 Act

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

A day after the historic defeat of amendments to the women's quota bill in Parliament, the opposition INDIA bloc decided to push for the immediate rollout of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, within the existing framework of the 543-member Lok Sabha, while also seeking to counter the BJP's narrative to portray the Opposition in a negative light.

At a meeting chaired by the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, on Saturday, top leaders of the alliance agreed that each constituent party would independently push for the implementation of the Act, while also continuing to raise the issue in public to hold the BJP accountable.

The meeting was also attended by CPP leader Sonia Gandhi, NCP (SP)'s Supriya Sule, Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Sanjay Raut, CPI(M)'s John Brittas, and CPI's P Sandosh Kumar, among others. It was decided that parties in the INDIA bloc will hold press conferences across the country and stress that they support women's reservation, adding Parliament had already passed the bill in 2023. By introducing three new bills, they said the government was trying to change the political map of the country under its guise.

At a press conference after the meeting, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi underlined that the Opposition was not against reservation for women and would support the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, if the government sought to implement it on the current strength of the Lok Sabha.

Congress MP Manickam Tagore said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to clarify when the government will implement the Act. "For the PM, it was a face-palm moment after he failed in pushing through a Constitutional amendment," said Tagore.

While there were suggestions among the parties to hold a joint press conference of the INDIA bloc or write a joint letter to the PM demanding implementation of quota for women in the existing framework immediately, leaders said the upcoming elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal may pose a hurdle for such joint action. "INDIA bloc parties will continue with the coordination on this issue, and we are confident that we will be able to do it adequately. A joint letter to the PM may be prepared soon," said a leader. P11

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

RCB's Virat Kohli (19 runs) and Phil Salt (63 runs) during the Royal Challengers Bengaluru vs Delhi Capitals match at Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on Saturday. DC, chasing a target of 176, defeated RCB in the last-over thriller | KEVIN NASHON | P17

Soon, common man's drink to cost 20% more

BALA CHAUHAN @Bengaluru

THE maximum retail price (MRP) on the common man's alcohol -- whiskey, rum, gin and brandy -- in Karnataka will soon increase by at least 20%, with the government issuing a draft notification to bring in a new tax structure that will tax the content of alcohol in beverages. Higher the content of alcohol in Indian Made Liquor (IML) made in Karnataka, higher will be the tax on it once the amendment comes into effect.

IML in the state is sold in slabs depending upon the MRP. The first four excise slabs, which till now are with the lowest MRP and meant for low-income group consumers, now stand to become more expensive. The average alcohol content in this segment of IML is 42.8v/v. These four slabs contribute 80% towards the excise revenue. From Rs 80 per 180 ml (nip) the price last year went up to Rs 95 per nip. It will now cost between Rs 105-110 with AIB taxation.

The government on Saturday issued draft notification to amend a more than six-decade-long alcohol taxation policy and usher in 'Alcohol-in-Beverage' (AIB)-based excise duty structure. With amendment to Karnataka Excise (Excise Duties and Fees) Rules, 1968, the state will become the first in India to introduce excise duty based on AIB. Though this rule is prevalent in the western countries, this is the first time an Indian state has moved to change the tax structure from volume based (per bulk litre) to actual alcohol content in beverages.

The new tax regime, which will come into play phase wise following the amendment, will increase the MRP of alcohol sold in the first four Excise slabs (the cheapest, with 42.8% alcohol v/v), while bringing down the cost of premium alcohol in the top slabs like Scotch (bottled in origin with 40% v/v). Prices of mild beer (less than 5% v/v) may face lower taxes. CONTINUED ON: P5

Govt's grants for courts 'peanuts', says SC judge

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE government allocation for judicial infrastructure is "peanuts" compared to the revenue courts generate, said Supreme Court Judge, Justice Arvind Kumar, addressing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah here on Saturday.

He raised concerns over inadequate funding and delays in approvals for judicial infrastructure and staffing, while speaking at the 22nd biennial state-level conference of judicial officers with its theme "Re-imagining the judiciary in the era of AI", organised by the Karnataka State Judicial Officers' Association.

Justice Kumar acknowledged the state government's support, but stressed that critical gaps persist in infrastructure creation, including court buildings and residential facilities for judges in districts. P6

Weed out corrupt judges, says Justice Nagarathna

To preserve the integrity of the judiciary, strict action should be taken against judicial officers who fall prey to greed and such individuals must be "weeded out of the system", said SC judge, Justice B V Nagarathna | P6

Maritime insurance pool to protect cargo amid conflict

RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

AS the war in West Asia disrupts oil and gas supply—partly due to reduced vessel movement linked to insurance constraints—the government has approved the creation of the Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool (BMI Pool) with a sovereign guarantee of ₹12,980 crore.

The government said the objective of the insurance pool is to ensure uninterrupted and affordable marine insurance for India's shipping sector, while also reducing dependence on foreign insurers, particularly the International Group of P&I Clubs, which dominate the maritime insurance market. The war has led to many shipowners halting operations. Some insurers have become unwilling to provide coverage due to heightened risks.

According to the government, the BMI Pool will function as a collective of Indian insurance companies working together to provide marine insurance.

Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said public sector reinsurer General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC Re) will act as the administrator of the pool. GIC Re will contribute ₹400 crore, while public sector general insurance companies will chip in ₹280 crore, with the rest coming from private insurers and oil marketing firms.

"The BMI Pool will cut down the cost of insurance premium by at least 25% as of now," Vaishnaw said. The pool will provide coverage for Indian-flagged vessels, Indian-controlled ships, as well as ships arriving in or departing from Indian ports.

POLLS GET NEARER

89L voters in GBA final list

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

BENGALURU has 88,95,361 voters in the ward-wise voter list of five urban corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), said District Election Officer and Chief Commissioner M Maheshwar Rao.

Speaking to reporters after releasing the final voter list for the elections in GBA on Saturday, he said that the revised draft voter list was released on March 9.

The final voter list is being released after corrections and updates have been made.

"The revised draft voter list for the GBA municipal corporation elections includes 45,71,169 males, 43,22,557 females and 1,635 other voters, for a total of 88,95,361 voters, and 8,023 polling booths will be set up," he said.

Out of the total 369 wards under the GBA jurisdiction, Ward Number 51-Subramanyapura of Bengaluru South Municipal Corporation will have the highest number of voters, with 53,660 voters. Ward number 24-Vignan Nagar of Bengaluru East Municipal Corporation will have the lowest number of voters, with 12,897 voters. The final voter list has increased by 2,833 voters. P2

US EXTENDS SANCTION WAIVER ON RUSSIAN OIL TILL MAY 16

RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

WITH the war continuing in West Asia, the United States has extended its waiver on sanctions for countries importing Russian crude by a month until May 16.

This is the second such relaxation since the escalation of the West Asia crisis, which has disrupted the global crude supply following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

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According to the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) under the US Department of the Treasury, Russian oil and petroleum products loaded onto tankers—including those under sanctions—on or before 12.01 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time (9.31 a.m. IST) on April 17 can be purchased and received by most countries until May 16.

The previous waiver, issued in March, had expired on April 11. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had earlier indicated that the waiver would not be extended. However, the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which is now nearing two months, has significantly disrupted global crude and gas flows, prompting a reassessment. Russian crude is now expected to help offset supply shortages caused by reduced exports from Gulf producers. The US had also temporarily waived sanctions on Iranian crude imports for a month. This exemption set to expire on April 19.

As the world's third-largest crude oil consumer, India relies on imports to meet over 88% of its demand. Russia has emerged as India's top oil supplier since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war. Despite criticism from the West that purchasing discounted Russian crude effectively funds the war, New Delhi has continued to purchase crude from Moscow.

EXPRESS READ

2% DA hike for Central government employees

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet on Saturday approved raisisng Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (DR) by 2%, benefiting about 50.46 lakh Central government employees and 68.27 lakh pensioners. Its impact on the exchequer would be ₹6,791.24 cr per annum | P11

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